

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

**VA WARNS OF TELEPHONE PRESCRIPTION SCAM** (VA News Release October 19, 2005) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is warning veterans not to give credit card numbers over the phone to callers claiming to update VA prescription information. The latest scam, currently centered in the Midwest, comes from callers who identify themselves as working for the "Patient Care Group." They say VA recently changed procedures for dispensing prescriptions and ask for the veteran's credit card number.

VA does not call veterans and ask them to disclose personal financial information over the phone, and VA has not changed its processes for dispensing prescription medicines. Veterans with questions about VA services should contact the nearest VA medical center or call, toll-free, 1-877-222-8387.

**COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT (COLA)** VA benefits are increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under Social Security are increased effective December 1, based on the Consumer Price Index. This year the increase is 4.1 percent. The increased rate will appear in the payments for the month of December, which are issued on the last weekday of December. All beneficiaries will be informed of the new rate by letter.

**ORIGINS OF VETERANS DAY** In 1921, an unknown World War I American soldier was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Similar ceremonies occurred earlier in England and France, where an unknown soldier was buried in each nation's highest place of honor (in England, Westminster Abbey; in France, the Arc de Triomphe). These memorial gestures all took place on November 11, giving universal recognition to the celebrated ending of World War I fighting at 11 a.m., November 11, 1918 (the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month). The day became known as "Armistice Day."

Armistice Day officially received its name in America in 1926 through a Congressional resolution. It became a national holiday 12 years later by similar Congressional

action. The first celebration using the term "Veterans Day" occurred in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1947. Raymond Weeks, a World War II veteran, organized "National Veterans Day" on November 11 which included a parade and other festivities, to honor all veterans. Later, U.S. Representative Edward Rees of Kansas proposed a bill that would change Armistice Day to Veterans Day. In 1954, Congress passed the bill that President Eisenhower signed proclaiming November 11 as Veterans Day. Raymond Weeks received the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Reagan in November 1982. Weeks' local parade and ceremonies are now an annual event celebrated nationwide.

A law passed in 1968 changed the national commemoration of Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October. It soon became apparent, however, that November 11 was a date of historic significance to many Americans. Therefore, in 1978 Congress returned the observance to its traditional date.

Additional information on the history of Veterans Day, the Veterans Day National Committee, the national ceremony, a gallery of Veterans Day posters from 1978 to the present and a colorful and informative Veterans Day Teacher's Resource Guide can be found on the Internet at <http://www.va.gov/vetsday/>

**VA WAIVER REDUCTION?** Military retirees who are in receipt of VA compensation and Concurrent Retired and Disability Payment (CRDP) received Retiree Account Statements showing a reduction in the amount of the "VA WAIVER" effective November 1, 2005. The "VA WAIVER" is the retired pay withheld in lieu of VA compensation. Prior to CRDP, the law required retirees to waive from their retired pay an amount equal to their VA compensation payment amount in order to receive the VA compensation.

CRDP provides a 10-year phase-out of the offset to military retired pay due to receipt of VA disability compensation for members whose combined disability rating is 50% or greater. The CRDP payments are taxable income. The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) is making

the CRDP payments by reducing the amount of retired pay waived in lieu of VA compensation. At the end of the ten-year period the "VA WAIVER" will be gone. (Effective 01-01-2005, CRDP-eligible retirees with 100 percent disability ratings receive both the full amount of their retired pay and VA compensation, with no "VA WAIVER.")

The VA compensation rates are unchanged. Retirees will receive the same rate from VA, and the VA payments are tax free. Their retired pay will be increased by the amount that the "VA WAIVER" was reduced. For more information, retirees may call DFAS at 1-800-321-1080.

**BRAIN CANCER IN GULF WAR VETERANS** The Department of Defense (DoD) has started to mail out letters to more than 100,000 Gulf War veterans estimated to have been exposed to low levels of sarin, informing them of the results from a recent scientific study showing an increased risk of brain cancer among US Army Gulf War veterans during March 1991 weapons demolitions at Khamisiyah. The study, "Mortality in US Army Gulf War Veterans Exposed to 1991 Khamisiyah Chemical Munitions Destruction," was published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in August 2005.

Although VA has no special authority to provide treatment for veterans coming to VA in response to DoD's letter, veterans from the 1991 Gulf War are eligible for a Gulf War Registry examination without charge, available at any VA Medical Center.

Shortly after the article was published, Congressman Lane Evans and Senator Larry Craig publicly called upon VA to consider providing a presumption of service-connection for Gulf War veterans diagnosed with brain cancer. Service connection means that the facts, shown by evidence, establish that a particular injury or disease resulting in disability was incurred coincident with service in the Armed Forces. This may be accomplished by affirmatively showing inception or aggravation during service or through the application of statutory presumptions.

Currently, there is no basis for granting benefits on a presumptive basis for brain cancer based on sarin exposure in Khamisiyah in 1991. VA is asking the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to review the scientific evidence on Gulf War health issues, including the study report, in their next "Gulf War & Health" update, which should be done some time next calendar year.

#### **IMPORTANT DATES IN NOVEMBER**

**November 1** payments for October due

**November 3** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation or pension awards in time for the 12-01-2005 payments

**November 11** Federal holiday - Veterans Day

**November 15** last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 12-01-2005 payments

**November 24** Federal Holiday - Thanksgiving

#### **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024  
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

**Foreign Medical Program Office** (medical treatment abroad) -  
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

#### **National Cemeteries**

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**  
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility)  
PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120  
**1-888-244-6711**

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit** -  
Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

#### **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Forms: **www.va.gov/vaforms**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)  
**www.warms.vba.va.gov**

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessioned homes):  
**www.ocwen.com**

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **www.floridavets.org**  
St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**